

AN EVALUATION OF REQUISITE PARENTING – AN OPTIMAL BLACK PARENTING STYLE

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WHY IS THIS STUDY IMPORTANT?

In social work, universalised systems, and processes such as parenting styles impact on children and families in fundamental ways (Sangawi et al., 2015; Nwufo et al., 2022), especially because they are employed as evidence-based tools for measuring and supporting parenting capacity. Therefore, Black parents in Western societies tend to breach social work parenting guidelines when they experience difficulties linked to systemic barriers and adapt their practices outside Eurocentric norms (Kelch-Oliver and Smith, 2015).

Baumrind's (1996) parenting styles – authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and unengaged parenting – is the most widely established parenting typology. The profound impact of structural factors like racism and poverty on Black people are barely explored in known parenting typologies. Black parents report using firmer practices than other groups (Duong et al., 2021), for which they are usually categorised as authoritarian. Meanwhile, none of the said styles adequately explains what good Black parenting is.

Okpokiri's (2017) study found that good Black parents were predominantly using a parenting style poorly understood by non-Black populations, including professionals and policymakers.

There was also no known research documenting this *Black parenting style*.

From findings of the 2017 research, Okpokiri grouped distinct positive Black parenting practices into key principles, to generate a parenting style termed 'requisite parenting'. Requisite parenting has six principles: *selfless love, pride, adaptability, resourcefulness, courage, and spirituality* (SPARCS).

This briefing presents findings from a qualitative evaluation of how requisite parenting aligns with research participants' understandings of positive Black parenting.

AIMS OF THE STUDY

In evaluating how the principles of requisite parenting align with participants' (Black children and parents, and social workers and child practitioners) understandings of positive Black parenting, the research sought to achieve the following:

- Describe good Black parenting practices from early adolescence when identity issues in children begin to come to the fore.
- Illuminate what underlying concerns drive parents' thinking regarding Black children's welfare.
- Highlight how Black parenting practices might differ from parents whose children are not Black.

The core focus of the research was the *style* of parenting, rather than specific parenting practices.

METHODS

The research applied a qualitative approach consisting of a hybrid of evaluation research (Patton, 2015) and participatory inquiry (Chevalier and Buckles, 2019), termed *evaluative participatory inquiry*. Fricker's (2007) conceptualisation of power as being socially situated was employed as theoretical lens.

Data collection included:

- 34 individual semi-structured interviews, and 4 focus group discussions.
- Superdiversity (Álvarez-Pérez et al., 2022) sampling:
 - Participants of Black African, Black Caribbean, Black British, Black Other backgrounds.
 - 17 parents, 11 children, and 6 social workers and child practitioners.
 - 3 regions in England – East, Midlands, Greater London.
- Child-centred interviews – use of Lego dolls depicting Black professionals.
- Culturally sensitive fieldwork: racially literate research assistants; racially sensitive interviewing; feasting on *soul food* during focus group discussions.
- Frame analysis (Cornelissen, 2014) was used to obtain frames that generate, sustain, or refute public discourses about Black parenting.

KEY FINDINGS

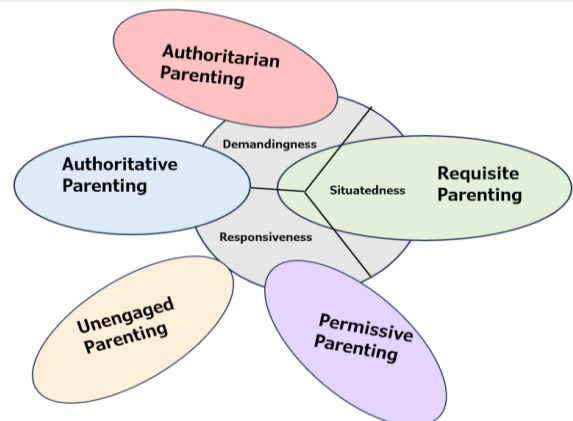
Theorising the Requisite Parenting Style

Requisite parenting builds on internationally recognised parenting typology developed by Diana Baumrind (1971, 1996) and Maccoby and Martin (1983). The authors based the four best known parenting styles which are: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and unengaged, on two parenting dimensions – *demandingness* (expectations and boundaries) and *responsiveness* (warmth and support).

Meanwhile, requisite parenting is founded on three dimensions: *demandingness*, *responsiveness*, and *situatedness*. Black parenting is *situated* within a set of unique structural challenges such as racism and poverty which make raising Black children more complex.

These inequalities require the dimension of 'situatedness' and differentiate requisite parenting from other established parenting styles.

Dimensions of parenting: *Demandingness, Responsiveness – Introducing Situatedness*



*Requisite parenting[®] (Okpokiri 2024) develops parenting typology by Baumrind (1996) & Maccoby & Martin (1983)

What is Requisite Parenting?

In RP, Black parenting is grouped into six principles: *Selfless love, Pride, Adaptability, Resourcefulness, Courage, Spirituality* – (**SPARCS**).

Principles of Requisite Parenting

Selfless love: selfless love, intense personal labour from parents. Investment in children, including financial, time, educational, emotional, and practical care.

Pride: affirmation that whatever the child attains is against the odds; identity fostering, and nigrescence (pride in Black identity and features), physical care of Black body and hair, psychological care of self-esteem, rejection of deficit narratives regarding Black people, promotion of positive Black image.

Adaptability: being nimble, mobile outlook and approach, acculturation (spatial and interpersonal), astute, and able to evolve with the situation/circumstance/environment.

Resourcefulness: being open to finding and using new information, opportunities, and materials to help the child develop against adversity.

Courage: ability to explain harsh realities to children of varied ages in age-appropriate ways – ‘the talk’; to take a stance. Discipline with courage and compassion. Strength to persevere for and with children in the face of damaging systemic social injury such as racism and/or poverty.

Spirituality: hope and belief for and with children, that against substantial odds, the children can grow, thrive, and/or excel. Faith – religious or non-religious faith, that innate or supernatural powers can help children overcome incredible obstacles; the notion of superhuman strength of the soul. Tapping into transcendental forces within and around children to support their uniqueness.

The Evaluation – How did participants make sense of the model?

Black children, their parents, and social workers and child practitioners in the study wholeheartedly endorsed requisite parenting (RP) as a positive Black parenting style. They thought the approach reflects their various experiences of Black parenting.

Each principle of RP nevertheless presents opportunities and challenges to stakeholders. For instance, participants perceived *Pride* and *Spirituality* as most unique and representative of Black parenting experiences. While *Adaptability* presented the most challenges to the parents, especially in view of the rapid changes in modern society’s progressive interpretations of gender and sexuality, including ideas about transgender, gender identity and expression. Parents recommended *Courage* and *Resourcefulness*, which they thought were particularly important for other parents to show their children how to overcome the wide-reaching impact of racism.

Parents saw *selfless love* as the most inevitable of the principles and the one largely shared across races, ethnicities, and cultures. But this principle is made more difficult for Black parents because of structural challenges such as racism and poverty.

Black parents are more likely to work in lower paid jobs and for longer hours because of the identified structural factors, and this can impact on their ability to practice the principle of *Selfless love*.

For children, engaging with spirituality, which sometimes meant forgiving those who have racially harmed them, was sometimes difficult. Not surprisingly, participating boys aged between eleven and fifteen years appeared to experience more threatening interactions from members of the public and professionals. The girls sometimes felt mistreated by their peers because of their different textured hair and skin colour. The children and young people felt teachers and other professionals did not always treat them fairly in comparison with their White peers.

Social workers and child practitioners said the model reflects their experiences of working with Black children and their parents. Some practitioners were concerned some of their professional colleagues might resist the parenting approach, especially those unable to see the parents’ practices from a strengths-based perspective.

The model has been updated with input from participants in line with the project’s participatory approach, and the revision forms the basis of the recommendations set out in subsequent sections of this briefing.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

At the Individual Level

A guide for understanding Black parenting.

Most parents felt justified and proud during interviews when they realised their practices were well aligned to the principles of RP shared with them. Some parents sobbed openly from relief during interviews – because they felt heard and validated. That sense of gratification is important because it provides motivation for parents of Black children and authenticates their realities, especially after feelings of being persecuted by racialised public and professional censure.

The model should also help build trust between Black children and their parents, as the children will better understand the thinking behind their parents' attitudes and practices.

Requisite parenting provides a useful benchmark for parents to self-assess their practices, and likewise for professionals who work with Black children and parents to help the families better articulate how they support their children.

At the Meso and Macro Levels: Professional, Policy and Public/Media

Promote Black parent-child partnership.

When professionals intervene in Black families, they should work consciously not to undermine the parents' already diminished authority. Practitioners can promote Black parent-child partnership through being *light-touch mediators* – they could draw on relevant principles of RP to explain the parents' efforts and challenges to the child, and vice versa. In their role as corporate parents, professionals working with Black children should be trained to engage children and parents in discussions and interactions which seek to find common ground on contentious issues. Professionals can draw on the principles of RP for a window into parents' considerations and children's needs.

To strengthen the Black parent-child relationship and the success of requisite parenting approach, three factors must be present:

1. the child should perceive the parent as acting in their best interest and be open to accept the authority of the parent
2. parents should be open to seeing their children's lifeworld as being both similar to theirs in terms of structural racism and/or poverty, and being distinct and unique to the children in ways that transcend the parents' experiences
3. professionals and policy makers should embody and project respect for Black parents.

Professionals, policy makers, and the media can draw on RP to produce necessary counter discourses that highlight the high emotional and practical labour of Black parenting.

Different lenses for assessing and supporting Black parenting and child welfare.

Black people bear extra burden in racialised societies, which a participant termed the "Black levy", because of enduring stigmatisation of Black people's physical features – darker skin, tightly-sprung hair, broad noses and lips that are distinct from every other race's (Martine Luther King, in Osborne, 2005).

Some parents are firmer with their Black children, especially boys, because their lived experience and statistics indicate Black children will suffer worse punishment in Western societies if they break rules outside the home (see Lammy, 2017). Professionals should be open to *seeing* such parents' practices differently. Professionals should take care and time to understand the context of such interactions before making conclusions. The cold and emotionally distant Black parent is a labelling trope and example of universalised *lens* used in judgements about Black parents' practices.

It is important that parents are trusted to make such decisions about how best to support their children if children do not bear any signs of abuse.

When working with Black families, professionals should be alert to how racism complicates Black parenting. This means professionals cannot depend on current universalised parenting theories and styles, as those are based on Eurocentric knowledges and experiences that do not properly take the impact of racism into account.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE MODEL

The RP model centres Black children and their parents in positive ways not normally found in Western discourses. RP affords Black children their innocence, vulnerability, and independence, while legitimising and empowering their Black parenting.

The research adopted a novel hybrid evaluative and participatory approach that enabled participants feel seen and heard – their input helped to improve the final iteration of the model. RP does not mean Black parents do not also practise authoritative parenting as a positive parenting style – instead, it adds to the list of good parenting styles accessible to those raising Black children. Black parents in general can still be found to be practising any of the other established parenting styles.

Requisite parenting is nuanced and recognises the complexities of parenting. Professionals should not conflate its principles with abusive parenting – signs of abuse in Black children should be investigated appropriately.

The approach is situated, which means that as an applied theoretical frame, it is mainly relevant in specific contexts, where families are living under certain structural adversities such as racism or poverty. *Situated* contexts could be applicable to non-Black parents – the model could be extended to other marginalised groups who experience significant structural adversity, including poverty, depending on how such groups are constructed within social systems.

Only three fathers participated in the study, which makes it gendered towards mothers. Nonetheless, most studies about parenting, across various nationalities and cultures, indicate women still bear greater responsibility in parenting (Willey, 2020).

IMPACT

Barnardo's Children's Charity has organised a research briefing of the full findings of the study in June 2024. The study is being published in a social work journal to be confirmed, and in book format. Relevant parties including Black children and their parents, practitioners, academics and scholars, policymakers, media, and the public are welcome to engage with the model to improve the wellbeing of and outcomes for Black children and families. Individuals and organisations are also invited to enhance or undertake further research on the model.

FIND OUT MORE

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HOW TO CITE THIS RESEARCH BRIEFING

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